

San Francisco

WASHINGTON POST

Approved For Release 2002/01/22 : CIA-RDP73B00296R000200040033-0

29 MAY 1971

Secret War Report Planned

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Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) said yesterday he will demand a rare secret session of the Senate to give senators the full story about U.S. involvement in "the long and tragic war being conducted" in northern Laos.

This will mark the second time in two years that the Senate has gone into secret session on the Laotian war.

On Dec. 15, 1969, the Senate also went into secret meeting to discuss the extent to which the United States was financing and assisting the the Royal Laotian government against Communist and Pathet Lao foes in northern Laos.

Immediately afterwards, it approved by an 80-to-9 vote a prohibition against introduction of U.S. ground combat troops into Laos or Thailand. It is still in effect.

Although little has been made public about the details of U.S. involvement, it is estimated that the CIA has been financing an army of as many as 32,000 Meo and other tribesmen in northern Laos. It has also been covertly financing Thai troops fighting on the side of the Royal Lao Forces.

The United States has also been conducting B-52 raids against the Communists in northern Laos and providing

money and supplies to the government. The United States, according to some sources, has been supplying most of the Lao government budget, 90 per cent or more.

No public estimate has ever been given of the total costs to the United States, but one source has put the figure as high as \$334 million in a past year and \$280 million in the current year. These may be only partial figures, however.

Symington is not expected to ask for the secret session until the week after next at the earliest, because he wants to let debate on amendments to the draft bill finish first. He will have no trouble obtaining it, because, according to a Senate official, any senator can demand and obtain a secret session if seconded by another senator.

Symington said yesterday that before the Senate votes any more money "for this clandestine war," it should be informed about "additional military developments" in Laos.

The Symington announcement, made in a speech at Harvard University last night, reflects a new fear among some members of the Senate that U.S. involvement in the Laotian war, which has been dragging on for a number of years, may be a tunnel with no light at the end.

Two staff members of Symington's Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad testified last week that they learned during an April visit to Laos, that the CIA is now financing 4,800 Thai troops fighting in northern Laos on behalf of the Laotian government. The figure apparently was increased from only 1,000 a year ago.

Senators present at the closed meeting said the CIA felt those troops were needed because the Meo tribesmen supported by the CIA had been decimated in years of fighting.